

Two Men, Two Missions to Memphis

Three times in five years assassins' bullets cut down leading figures in American public life. One was President of the United States. Another was his brother, a leading contender for the office. The third was Martin Luther King Jr., a black minister from Atlanta who in a dozen years had risen from assistant in his family church to spokesman for millions of his people. He received the Nobel Prize for Peace, was courted—and condemned—by statesman and commoner and, in death, achieved martyrdom.

Jim Bishop author of "The Day Lincoln was Shot," "The Day Kennedy Was Shot" and other bestselling biography, has gone behind the legend of King. Bishop's "The Days of Martin Luther King Jr." begins today with Bishop's plotting of the parallel movements of King and his assassin, James Earl Ray, during the last week of King's life.

First in a Series

By Jim Bishop

He stared through the window, the commiserating brown eyes looking at the concrete runway but not seeing it. The jet motors whined, but the plane did not move. It was pinned to John F. Kennedy Airport like a tin butterfly. "We're going to be late in Memphis," he said. The cheerful clergyman was always late. People begged his to come to Los Angeles, to Washington, to Detroit,



By Margaret Thomas—The Washington Post

Dr. King at Washington Cathedral on March 31, 1968.

to Chicago, and all the invitations were imperative. Nothing would go right unless Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was present.

"It isn't our style of opera-

tion," said the twin sitting in the aisle seat. There was no response. The Rev. Bernard Lee, bodyguard and companion, looked like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.,

talked like him, and, in minor key, thought like him. "When the President of the United States visits someplace, his men go there and see what the situation is. We got no intelligence on Memphis." Dr. King was not President of the United States, but Bernard Lee had uttered a truth.

Usually, Dr. King's personal staff, in conference with the hierarchy of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, worked on matters of personal safety weeks ahead of each march. This time there was, as Lee stated, no advance work.

If there was a weakness in the system, it could be laid at the feet of King himself. It was difficult for him to say the word "no." Weeks before, he had been at a convention of preachers in Miami, and he had been entreated, not once, but three times, to go to Memphis and attend a rally for striking Negro garbage men. He had been planning a gigantic Poor People's March on Washington, knowing that he had better make it a good one, especially convincing to Congress and Lyndon Johnson. He needed a victory desperately.

He had the whip of the militants, Rap Brown, Eldridge Cleaver, Malcolm X, and he had referred to them as "the crazies." He preached nonviolence and he was sincere. His mind,

See KING, A10, Col. 1

KING, From A1

his heart were concentrating solely on the Poor People's March—not on Memphis. Still, he had said yes to the Rev. Ralph Jackson; he had said yes to Jim Lawson, who with a handful of followers, represented the only Southern Christian Conference strength in Memphis; he had said yes, most of all, to the Rev. Samuel B. Kyles.

He had left the Hilton in New York too early to call his wife. She was in Washington trying to get support from women's organizations for the Poor People's March. Coretta would be the star at a press conference and there she would call for peace in Asia, just as Dr. King had done recently. Many Americans felt it was a subversive cry for defeat. Others applauded his stand.

Yet he was neither a Communist nor a radical. Martin Luther King was a political shopper. He would accept any candidate who would lend his office to the cause of blacks.

The protest march in Memphis had been originally scheduled for March 22, 1968. An unseasonal foot of snow had fallen and the protest had been postponed six days. Black groups not associated with the sanitation workers began to volunteer to join them. A young group called the Invaders, originally organized in Chicago, had a branch in Memphis, and their leaders complained that they had not been consulted about the march or the limits of the protest.

To mollify them, a group of ministers agreed to a meeting. The Invaders asked why the march should not be turned into a violent demonstration of power and destructiveness at some point along Beale Street. The elders were shocked. With restraint, they argued that Martin Luther King was committed to nonviolence, that he would not come to Memphis if he knew of this proposal. "Man," one of the Invaders said, "if you expect honkies to get the message, you got to break some windows." The meeting adjourned with no decision on either side. The Invaders found a mimeograph machine and ran off hundreds of sheets defin-

ing the ingredients of a Molotov cocktail. Many of these papers reached Hamilton High School, where black students waited impatiently for lunchtime to join the march. When the moment arrived, on Thursday the twenty-eighth, they were met by Mayor Henry Loeb's riot police on the school grounds. The boys retreated, then returned with a torrent of rocks and bottles.

The march in Memphis had started. It was orderly, rank on rank of blacks linking arms with their fellows to spread from curb to curb. King got out of the limousine. He backed into the front row of marchers, held his elbows out, and grinned with the delight of a child who knows that he is not breaking any law, but that he is breaking a will to resist.

There were many thousands more nonviolent marchers than violent ones, but Martin Luther King, unknowingly, was leading a gigantic walking time bomb.

Some came up behind Martin Luther King Jr. and shoved him forward. He kept himself from falling and looked back. His assailant was a very young man. Dr. King was pushed again. This time he turned backward and found that black teen-agers on the curbs were

moving in on the marchers. He saw the young fighting the police to break up the ranks of marchers.

Lee said to Jim Lawson, "We're pulling out. We denounce this march." Scalps were split, and the blood of blacks ran red down the sides of their faces. The Rev. Samuel "Billy" Kyles grabbed a radio from a black marshal. A monotonous voice kept asking: "Permission to break up the march. Permission to break up the march. Permission. . ."

Permission was granted from police headquarters, and the police formed ranks in front of the line of march. In a moment the marchers had reversed themselves and were fleeing in the opposite direction. The police struck out with clubs and tear gas, hurled high over the fleeing mob.

King was frightened, King

was shocked; but he didn't want it said that he had left the line of march under fire. He required someone to force him to leave. Bernard Lee didn't wait. He yanked King forward and down a side street. King appeared to have momentarily lost control. His features were slack with horror. He followed the pulling arm, but his flowered tie was askew; his jacket twisted to one side. His breath was coming in gasps as they trotted away from the frightfulness.

Martin Luther King was still trotting behind Bernard Lee when Lee saw a car with two black women in it. "Please," he begged. "Stop. Stop. This is Dr. Martin Luther King. Please stop." The car stopped. King stumbled into the back seat with Abernathy and Lee. "Take us to the Rivermont Motel," Lee said softly.

With sundown, Memphis became quiet. The toll was 60 persons injured, 280 arrested and 1 dead.

King returned to his room. No newspaper was going to blame Jim Lawson or Billy Kyles or anybody but King. It didn't matter who started it and who finished it—the onus was on Martin Luther King Jr. He knew it.

His people, he heard, were mocking him for living in a white motel on the banks of the Mississippi. Was he now so rich, so affluent, that he preached black and lived white? A man down in the parking lot sent an anonymous note. "History," it read, "has passed you by."

He walked the floor through the early hours of the morning. Physical violence was sickening to Martin Luther King. Whenever he was arrested, he went along not only quietly, but meekly and with fear. In such cases, he permitted personal abuse, such as being lifted off his feet by his coat collar or having his face held down against a precinct desk, without protest.

In the morning, four timid young men presented themselves. King sat with the youths. They felt respect for this great leader of their people, but they said that he

was "off the rails" as far as those nonviolent goals were concerned." Quietly, King asked them to speak up. A young man named Smith was the leader, and he said that, first of all, they wanted Dr. King to know that they were sorry about yesterday. They knew what he wanted; but he didn't know what they wanted, and that's how the trouble had started.

One said that none of the reverends would listen to them. After all, they represented the young people. They had a right to be heard. One teen-ager said that the Invaders, unlike their parents, did not have cars or money. The four of them sat looking at Dr. King. He asked them if an automobile and a little money would mean that much to them. They beamed their smiles at him. The black leader began to sense the distillation of bribery.

"Well," he said, "I want you to pledge that you and your followers will either practice nonviolence or stay away from the demonstrations." They promised. "I will try to get you fellows a car," he said, "and a little money."

Business seemed always

to be good at Robert E. Wood's Aeromarine Supply Company. His sports goods shop was spacious, and his prices were reasonable even though it appeared to be an odd choice to set up shop just off the big Birmingham Airport.

Sportsmen were in and out of Mr. Wood's store all day on Friday, March 29. The Smiler came in quietly, almost timidly. He looked around until he saw a rack of rifles and approached clerk U. L. Baker.

The Smiler said that he wanted to look over some rifles. Baker asked what kind. The customer said he didn't really know. He was going to go hunting with his brother, and he thought they'd be after deer. He was shown several types, and the Smiler hefted them as though he understood their varied uses. He excited no interest in anyone except Baker and Wood, who felt

that this man knew very little about rifles, ammunition, and deer.

The smiler finally settled on a Remington 700, caliber .243 Winchester. He asked if he could have twenty rounds of .243 ammunition, an amount which might last an hour or two in good hunting territory, and—oh, yes, he wanted a scope mounted on it. The customer gave his name as Harvey Lowmeyer.

The cash was paid, the gun and ammunition were dropped on the floor behind the front seat of a white Mustang, and the Smiler backed away from the store and disappeared. A short time later he phoned. Donald Wood answered. The voice said he was "Harvey Lowmeyer." "Well, it turned out that the rifle was not heavy enough," and could he come back and exchange it? Mr. Wood said he could return the firearm in the morning.

Saturday at 9 A.M. the Smiler returned. He was apologetic about the exchange of rifles but said that his brother figured that this one wasn't heavy enough. This time the novice knew exactly what he wanted. "Let me see a Re-

mington 760," he said. "30.06 caliber."

He was shown the rifle, heavier to level against the eye. "I can't adjust the scope right now," the clerk said. "How about three o'clock?" Mr. Ray returned in the white Mustang on time. The box of .243 cartridges was placed on the counter. It was exchanged for twenty Remington-Peters shells. Each weighed twice as much as the other bullets. The new ones would leave the muzzle at 2,670 feet per second, about three and a half times the speed of sound. James Earl Ray had something that would stop an elephant.

Sometimes there is a day when the telephone claims almost all attention. Monday, April 1, 1968, was such a day for Dr. King. He was in his paneled study at home most of the time, either dialing numbers or answering the phone. First of all, he wanted to know

what each man thought of Lyndon Johnson's abdication. Everyone had been shocked by the Presidential announcement but felt it would redound to the benefit of the Movement. Even though Johnson had been their hero in 1964, he had become their devil in 1968.

There was a lilt in the voice of Martin Luther King. The depressed mood was gone. Ordinarily, he did not question the minutiae of a march; now he insisted upon knowing who was doing what in Memphis and what guarantees he had that this was going to be nonviolent, nondrinking. Everything he heard on the phone reassured him.

It was Tuesday, April 2, 1968, that King stopped at the Ebenezer Baptist Church for his mail, and "Daddy" King caught him on the inside steps, coming up. The conversation between the two began on a family note. A. D. was at a convention in Miami. The younger brother was somewhat of a disappointment to "Daddy." The father's heart's desire was to raise God-fearing preachers who would cling to the oak until it fell. A. D. was rebellious; he had no desire to be Martin Luther King Sr. or Jr.

The conversation in the hallway moved to the Poor People's March in Washington. "Daddy" hoped that Martin wasn't seriously considering returning to Tennessee—the issue wasn't that big so far as the cause was concerned.

They talked for more than an hour. Nothing was accomplished on either side except the respectful evasions of reality. Martin was too far away for "Daddy" to reclaim him; "Daddy" was too close to his own neighborhood and his own business. He wanted what he could touch, and nothing more. He said good-bye to Martin, and the young reverend went on to his office.

The sun wasn't up when the Rev. Mr. Abernathy squeezed himself behind the wheel of his 1955 Ford, put the lights on, and started for King's house. They were booked on an early flight to Memphis, and he knew that King, who normally awakened at nine, had lately become restless and could not sleep beyond dawn.

Abernathy was wrong. Dr. King was still in bed when

he arrived. He rang the bell, and, in a trice, Mrs. King was up, offering juice and coffee and toast to both men, who said they didn't have time.

Aboard the plane, one of the crew said, "This plane has been under guard all



JAMES EARL RAY
... a life of crime

night. We have had a bomb threat. The Rev. Martin Luther King is aboard." King glanced at Abernathy. Both shook their heads.

Memphis was only an hour away, but the weather was bone-chilling and rainy. The usual big car was waiting for them. King told the driver, "Take us to the Lorraine." King was making sure this time that there would be no criticism by the blacks of Memphis that he was staying at a white motel.

Room 306 was a good one. It was on the second floor, facing the parking lot below and the covered swimming pool. King wasn't more than ten or twelve feet from the outside stairway. His staff had rooms upstairs and down, and the minister appeared frightened. He organized meetings in the various rooms, upstairs and down, and assigned various aspects of the march to each of them. This was Wednesday. Dr. King had made up his mind to hold the march on Monday. He was edgy.

The City of Memphis was in federal court asking for an injunction against all "non-residents of the city acting in concert" from or-

ganizing or starting a street demonstration. Andy Young was ordered to hurry to federal court to find out what was going on and to report back to King. He said to Abernathy, "Whether the injunction is granted or not, I am going to lead that march."

There was much to do in a short time. First of all, he wanted to meet those militants again—"those Invaders." The Rev. Mr. Kyles missed the meeting with the Invaders. Even if he had been invited, it is doubtful that he would have attended, because he knew these young men and he didn't trust them. Nor would he tell Dr. King a very important fact: "The Invaders had asked the Memphis ministerial group for \$100,000 to implement their own program of riot and arson. Kyles and his group had told them they wouldn't get one dollar.

It was after 4 p.m. when the Invaders arrived at the Lorraine. Jim Orange was present. So were Jim Bevel and Andy Young. A dozen of the young men came in. They smiled hello. No smiles were returned. "We want a part in this thing," one of them said. "See, nobody ever asks us. You're the first one." King told them that they had an important part in the march. They were to be the peace-keepers.

The Smiler was on his way to Memphis. He was in no hurry. The thing he had to do in Memphis could wait. So far as is known, no one was with him. In the car was his little bag—James Earl Ray was always particular about his shirts and socks and shorts—and the long cardboard package

with the rifle and the scope. He had one thing more: somebody's money in his pocket. Somebody from Atlanta or Birmingham kept him fairly well staked. Several times he had come from the West Coast and other far-off places almost broke, and sometimes his man met him in New Orleans, but more frequently in Birmingham and Atlanta.*

*After intensive research, the author found nothing to substantiate Ray's story of meeting a man named "Raoul" in Canada, a man Ray could not identify with a last name, an address, or even a plausible motive for selecting a witless person to kill Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Almost 2,000,000 words of correlated notes would indicate, with little room for doubt, that: (1) James Earl Ray had a financial backer and (2) the man who financed the assassination working alone or representing a group, ordered Ray where to go and when and promised to help him get to Rhodesia. The United States had no extradition treaty with Rhodesia, which had recently seceded from the Commonwealth of Nations.

The work of James Earl Ray was simple. Get a room, buy a newspaper, locate the quarry, and rent a nearby duck blind. That — and patience — would ensure the work. There would be no more tracking, no more problems, just a matter of getting out of Memphis safely and back to the payoff point. There he would have to abandon the white Mustang he enjoyed so much and then fly first to Canada, then to Great Britain, and finally to Africa.

And yet there were built-in weaknesses. The slim Smiler lacked intelligence. It would not be fair to state that he was stupid, but his history was one of ignorance and failure. He had elected to lead a life of crime, but he had been caught many times and knew more about the inside of prison bars than the outside. He grew up in Quincy, Ill., and in Ewing, Mo. — towns about twenty miles apart on opposite sides of the Mississippi River.

The father of the family, James Gerard Ray, was an ex-convict. The mother, Lucille, was an alcoholic. He had a difficult time trying to find work because of his

record; Lucille could give birth to children but couldn't rear them. Sometimes, in despair, they moved in with her family in Alton, Ill.; sometimes they returned to Quincy or Ewing. All the luck they had was hard. Lucille gave birth to James Earl Ray in 1928; Marjorie Raynes in 1930; John Larry the following year; Gerald in 1935 — in time, a total of nine. It is incredible that one large family should sustain so much anguish and sit in clapboard houses waiting for matters to get worse.

It wasn't until World War II started that the father found work with the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad. James Earl Ray

graduated from elementary school; his brother Gerry ran away from home. All of them, half alive, realized that the basic commodity in life was money. Toward the end of the war James got a job with International Shoe Company. He was diligent, neat, smiling, a good clerk. For two years, it appeared that the Ray family had spawned an energetic and law-abiding son.

The war ended. The government cut back on shoe orders. James Earl Ray was fired. On Feb. 19, 1946, James Earl Ray enlisted in the U.S. Army at East Saint Louis. He chose Germany for his assignment and became a military policeman in the 382d Battalion, stationed at Nuremberg.

He was, according to the records, a model soldier until he began drinking. He was transferred out of the Military Police to Company B, Sixteenth Regiment. James Earl Ray felt insulted and humiliated. He accepted the transfer and shortly thereafter was arrested for being drunk in quarters. After three days in a stockade he tried to escape and failed.

A court-martial gave James Earl Ray three months. He was not a model prisoner. A vicious streak began to show. Before half his sentence was up, Army officers said that he was not fit for service, and he was sent home. On his final papers they wrote "inept." He came home holding his arm up and yelling, "Heil Hit-

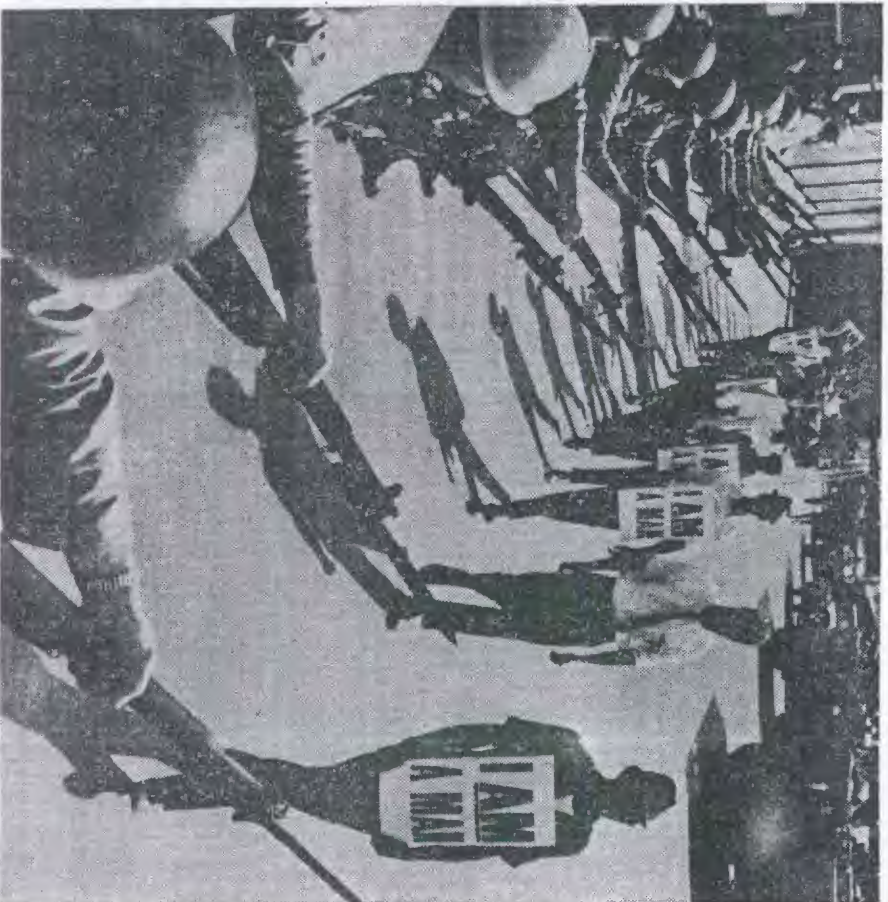
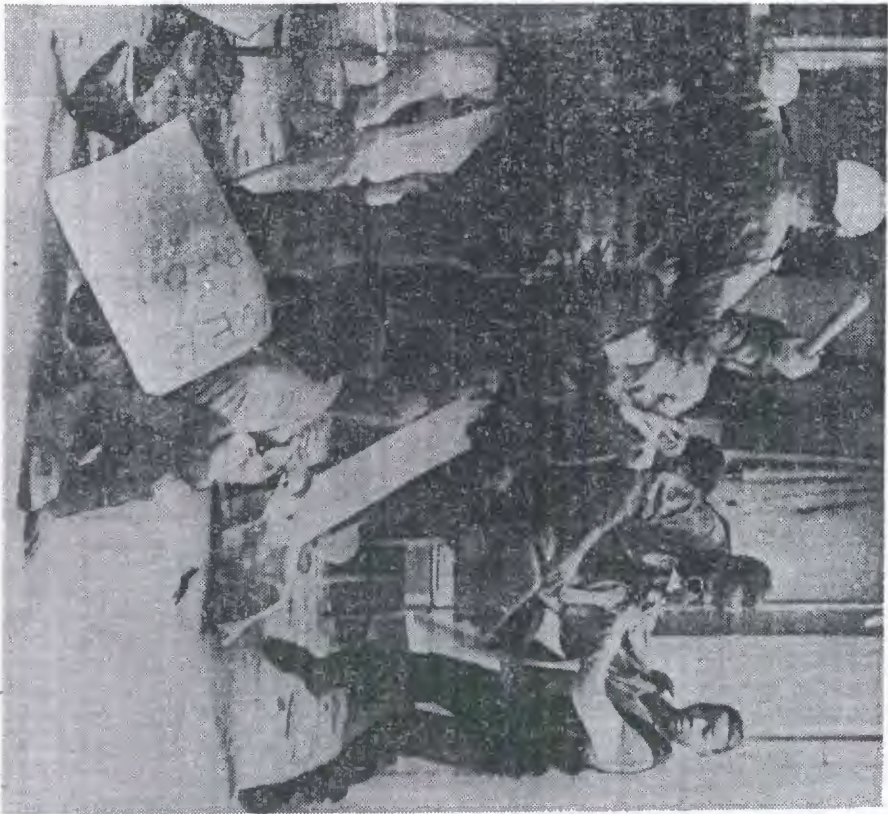
ler!"

Ray got a job in Chicago, bought a Mercury, lost the job, and saw the car repossessed. He was twenty-one years of age and broke. He had tried, and tried hard, to make a better life for himself than his mother and father had. In the Army he had sent allotment checks home. In sum, considering the family background, James Earl Ray had been a good son. The pleasant side of the law hadn't worked out, so Ray decided to try the unpleasant side.

In prison, convicts made sport of James Earl Ray. They called him a "hard luck character," a "stupo," a natural loser in the field of crime. He was in and out of prison so frequently that some wardens referred to James Earl Ray as the "commuter." Once he refused to transfer to a model prison farm because he heard that there were blacks in it. He said he hated blacks; he never said he had a desire to kill one.

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NEXT: The last day.



Associated Press and United Press International Photos

Memphis policemen waded into youths looting store after March 28, 1968, protest erupted into violence. National Guard bayonets, right, frame peaceful march next day.